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Scott, who shared these labours and saw the heroism and misery of the workers, speaks with understanding of the passionate idealism that sustained the Russians who made the sacrifice. He and they thought of it all as a war, in which the soldiers must be prepared to die. It was, he felt, a society for which it was worth while to shed blood and tears. The expropriated peasants, the political exiles, were a lost tribe, sacrificed on the altar of progress. They would die off, but by their death Socialism would win through to a time when it could function without scrapping blocks of its population every decade. A cruel concept, but there it was.

There was most certainly a great Russian idealism, even a grandeur in this plan and its achievement. But, like the valour of Sparta, it was a heroism that depended for survival on the labour of countless slaves and helots, pitilessly ground down and made to work at menial tasks without thought of human dignity. The helots of Turkish stock had not been born into the ranks of citizens, but they were set in the forefront of the battle to fight a cause that was not theirs. Most of them were inarticulate at the time, but later events were to demonstrate clearly enough that the iron had entered into their souls. Unlike the Russians, these did not believe the papers which told them daily they were the luckiest people in the world. The vast metallurgical combine of the Urals, the centre of the heavy industry of Soviet Asia, was set up just beyond and on the fringe of the most northerly of the five Central Asian republics. Their part in it was only to sweat and groan and die in mine or mill, to be frozen stiff on a scaffold at construction work or burned at a furnace mouth. In their own homeland they did not fare much better.

Beyond the Urals and within the political boundaries of the five republics the industrial lay-out was not quite so intensive and was certainly more varied. There are indeed non-ferrous metals in Turkistan of great importance. North of Balkhash at Kunrad, and in the Jezkazgan area of the northern steppe,

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433 are situated the largest copper-workings and smelting plants
328 in the Union, and there is another at Almalik close to Tashkent and therefore better placed for transport than the larger mines farther north. At Chimkent is the largest lead centre in the Union, working ore from many quarters, including the Tajik hills. And there are important minerals, said to include mercury, radium and uranium, in the mountains surrounding
433 the Farghana Valley. But, apart from the man-power they can supply to feed the industrial Moloch, the main importance of the five republics in this field is to be found in the production of the raw material for textiles — cotton and silk — and the availability of supplementary sources of power, which include oil, coal and water-generated electricity. The production of the last, hydro-electric power, is tied up in the minds of Soviet engineers with large-scale irrigation, and this in turn with transport, both by waterway and railway. In all these spheres there has been ambitious planning, and forecasts are often extravagant and even grandiose. In almost all cases it is hard to disentangle prospective targets from actual results, publicity media being regularly used to give an impression that projects which have not in fact left the draughtsman's table are on the point of realization in the field. Indeed it can fairly be said that almost any account of planned development in Soviet Russia, industrial or agricultural, calls for question on this ground. Usually the more poetic the vision of the publicist, the less advanced will be found to be the execution of the work. Another tendency is to claim as the triumph of the Soviet genius works which were in fact conceived and carried to an advanced stage by Tsarist engineers. This is particularly apparent in the field of railway works.

185 It is convenient to view industrial development in this region under four main heads:

(*a*) power, including oil, coal and hydro-electric;
(*b*) light industry, mainly cotton and silk textiles;
(*c*) irrigation;
(*d*) transport, railway and waterway.